

ALISON VAN PELT

Van Pelt was born and raised in California and grew up in Los Angeles, where she attended the University of California at Los Angeles. She came of age in the 1970s and her distinctive photorealist painting style is evocative of that era, when photography was assimilated into the art world. Painters—Richard Estes, Denis Peterson, Audrey Flack and Chuck Close among them—would create paintings that appeared to be photographs. Van Pelt begins by referencing a photograph or other existing image from which she draws and paints a realistic portrait entirely by hand. Next comes the work of obscuring the carefully rendered image. From a distance the image appears soft, as though photographed through a mist. But as the viewer approaches the work, vertical lines can be seen, and on closer inspection a sort of horizontal weave emerges. One writer described the effect this creates on Van Pelt's *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve* as, "so thick with paint and lines that it actually appears to have been applied to wood, not canvas."

In response to the observation that her work is abstract, Van Pelt has said, "It's my way of merging the tradition of portraiture with contemporary abstraction. I'm interested in ambiguity." A sublime tension is created in the contradiction between the crisp photorealism with which she first delineates her subject and the purposeful act of obscuring this subject, which ensues. Viewed up close, a grid of ambiguous color meets the eye, but with distance the viewer gains the necessary objectivity to discern the subject. However, even with this revelation, a question remains as one writer so aptly noted: "Are the figures stepping forth into the tangible world or are they receding into the depths of the canvas?"

The impetus for this creative tension has its origins in a visit to Paris in 1988. At the Beaubourg at Centre Georges Pompidou, Van Pelt was captivated by the way Francis Bacon had smeared the paint on the face of one of his subjects, and that same evening found a postcard in which the nighttime streetlights appeared as blurry lines. After she returned home to California, the memory of these two images led Van Pelt to experiment with blurring the paint on a portrait of a woman's face. Her style had coalesced. Her technique caught the attention of Los Angeles dealer Robert Berman, whose gallery exhibited several solo shows of Van Pelt's work.

In 1992, Van Pelt traveled to Florence, Italy to study painting at the Florence Academy of Art, where the ethereal style of her work prompted comparisons to the Shroud of Turin. During the two years she spent studying abroad, she showed her work in solo exhibitions overseas: the show *New Work* appeared at Galerie Paul Sties in Krönberg, Germany, *New Paintings* at Galerie Lauter in Mannheim, Germany, and *Les Animaux Nouveaux* at Galerie Vedovi in Brussels.

Van Pelt's portrait of William S. Burroughs welcomed visitors to *Ports of Entry*, an exhibit of Burroughs' work held at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1996. The Beat Generation hero's portrait, which appears on the cover for his book, has been described as a ghost-like image. One journalist described Van Pelt's portrait of Burroughs as "peering out at us with his trademark craggy deadpan, looking characteristically haunted." A Parisian art collector, who also videotapes séances claimed that her paintings looked exactly like the ghosts he records.

Influences

Despite the interest that the visceral nature of Bacon's paintings initially sparked, in comparison, Van Pelt's work evokes a more languid approach to her subjects... Gerhard Richter and Mark Rothko are among the artists who have exercised considerable influence on Van Pelt's technique. More than one reviewer has noted that her portraits recall Richter's blurred portraits of the infamous RAF members embroiled in the Baader-Meinhof scandal in the 1970s, but without the dark political associations. Nancy Burson's composite portraits also come to mind. The line and grid work of Agnes Martin sparked Van Pelt's meticulous attention to detail in which Van Pelt places as much focus on each brush stroke as she does on a piece of work in its entirety. Van Pelt has said that Plato's universal flow resonates for her.

Published work

Paul Ruscha's FULL MOON, Steidl Publishers, Göttingen, 2006

The Eclectic Eye; Selections from the Frederick R Weisman Art Foundation, Published by the Frederick R. Weisman Philanthropic Foundation, Los Angeles, CA, copyright 2004. Full page, four color reproduction, page 177, with text page 176. 2005

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 26th Annual Benefit Art Auction 2005, full color illustration page 12. 2005

Komanecky, Michael & Van Pelt, Alison. Alison Van Pelt The Women The Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio 2004

Yalkut, Jud. A Tribute to Some of the Greatest Female Artists of the 20th Century, A & C Visuals Dayton City Paper Weekly News & Culture, April 16, 2004, pg. 13. 2004

Rollins, Ron. About Face, Arts and Entertainment, Dayton Daily News, March 14, 2004

Appel, Brian. Fall Contemporary Art Sales in New York, Art

Critical.com, December, 2004, David Cohen, editor. 2004

Lassell, Michael. Sand Box, Metropolitan Home, March/April 2003

Reginato, James. W at Home House of Brad, W, October 2001

Sobieszek, Robert, A. Fight. Rusconi Publishing, Los Angeles, California 2000

Stunning Painting, Art Scene, January 2000

Paintings, Arts and Entertainment, January 2000

Ochi Exhibition, Wood River Journal, January 2000

The Universal Language, dART INTERNATIONAL, Winter 1999

Artist Profile, Cosmopolitan, August 1999

Wiener, Nicole. The Gadget Versus the Soul, Exhibition of the Human Form, FORM, June 1999

Collins, Linda. Whats On, The Argonaut, May 1999

Flight and the Figure: the Paintings of Alison Van Pelt, Rusconi Publishing, Los Angeles, 1999

Scheer, Robert. Los Angeles Times, November 15, 1998

Scheer, Robert. Los Angeles Times, August 14, 1998

Campbell, Clayton. Alison Van Pelt, Ouverture, July 1998

Neusch, Walter. Geheimnisvoll, ArtHaus, June 1998

Star Artist, Los Angeles Magazine, May 1998

Art Auction, Catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles 1998

Condo, Anna and Jerryl Oristaglio. Ah Allen, A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg, Grenfell Press, New York 1998

Blue Paintings, ArtCONNOISSEUR, Volume 1, Number 1 1998

Plattner, Anuschka. Ausstellung, Deutsche Word, February 1998

Man Ray in Hollywood, dART INTERNATIONAL, January 1998

Melrod, George. Femme Noir, World Art, No. 12 1997

Zappa, Moon. Earth to Moon, RAYGUN, November 1997

Ports of Entry, Exhibition Catalogue Cover, Los Angeles County Museum of Los Angeles County Museum of Art reproduction and text, pp. 154–158. 1996

Joselit, David. Burroughs Virology, Art in America, November. 1996

Garnier, Philippe. Burroughs, La Liberation, August 26, 1996

Art Auction, Catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles. 1996

Scheer, Robert. Los Angeles Times, January 10. 1996.

Melrod, George. Openings, Art & Antiques, September 14, 1995.

Finch, Liz. Whats on Art, The Argonaut, September 14, 1995

Marx, Heike. Das Blaue, Stop, July 1995

Madigan, Nick. Illusion or Reality? Santa Monica Outlook, August 19, 1994.

Reviews, ArtScene, October 1992

Carlson, Lance. Open House, Artweek, October 8, 1992

The Book/Los Angeles, Kahn & Partners, Los Angeles, 1989

Solo Exhibitions:

If I Were Ed Ruscha..., Ventura College, Ventura, CA, January 2011 February 2011

All American, Ochi Gallery, Ketchum, ID, December 2010 January 2011

Alison Van Pelt, The Fresno Art Museum, Fresno, CA, June 2006 August 2006

The Women, The Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH, January 2004 June 2004

America: The News, Chac Mool Gallery, Los Angeles, CA 2004

Paintings on Paper, Chac Mool Gallery, Los Angeles, CA 2002

Fight, Ochi, Los Angeles, CA 2000

Flight and the Figure, Ochi, Ketchum, ID 1999

Figures, Gallery 813, Los Angeles, CA 1999

Blue, Gallerie Lauter, Manheim, Germany 1998

Eros, Robert Berman Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA 1998

Motion, Robert Berman Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA 1997

Les Animaux Nouveaux, Gallerie Vedovi, Brussels, Belgium 1997

Blue, Robert Berman Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA 1995

New Paintings, Gallerie Lauter, Manheim, Germany 1995

New Works, Aschenbach Galerie, Amsterdam, Holland 1994

Recent Works, Robert Berman Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA

New Paintings, Roger Smith Gallery, New York, NY 1994

New Work, Gallerie Paul Sties, Kronberg, Germany 1993

New Paintings, Robert Berman Gallery, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, CA 1992

Nouvelles Oeuvres, Ulla Lutz Studio, Basel, Switzerland 1992

La French Collection, Les Andelys, France 1992

Tableaux Nouveaux, Ader Tajan, Paris, France 1992

New Works, B-1 Gallery, Santa Monica, CA 1991

Group exhibitions:

Elements of Nature: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation
Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans - 2010

Under the Influence of Fashion and Finance, Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art,
Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA - 2010

Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY - 2010

Homage to the Artists, Ochi Gallery, Ketchum, ID - 2009

Incognito, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA - 2008

California Art, Platt/Borstein Galleries at American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA

LA Art House, Beverly Hills, CA- 2009

Beverly Hills Municipal Gallery, Beverly Hills, CA - 2006

Small Wonders II, Pharmaka Gallery, Los Angeles, CA - 2006

Portraits, curated by Shane Guffogg, Pharmaka Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA - 2005

The Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH - 2005

Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA - 2004

New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA - 2004

Spike Gallery, New York, NY - 2004

California State University at Bakersfield, Bakersfield, CA - 2003

Spike Gallery, New York, NY - 2003

Las Vegas Art Museum, Las Vegas, NV - 2002

Ah Allen, New York, NY - 1998

Track 16, Santa Monica, CA - 1996

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA - 1996

Robert Berman Gallery, Santa Monica, CA - 1994

Ader Tajan, Paris, France - May 1992

Robert Berman Gallery, Santa Monica, CA - 1992

Public and Corporate Collections

Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

Bank of America, San Francisco, CA

Castilla Foundation, Madrid, Spain

Chevron Corporation Chevron Environmental Management Company, San Ramon, CA

Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH

Fresno Art Museum, Fresno, CA

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA

Frederick R. Weisman Museum, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN

Jumex Foundation, Mexico City, Mexico

Kayne Foundation, Los Angeles, CA

Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

NASA, Washington, D.C.

The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC

NBC Studios, New York, NY

Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, NY

Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

Van Pelt Dietrich Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA